

March 21, 2014

Jeffrey L. Cross
President, Concerned Taxpayers of the Thompsonville Fire District
P.O. Box 651
Enfield, CT 06083

Legislators,

First, I want to thank you for this opportunity to speak to regarding this issue. The issue at hand is the right of the taxpayers of the Thompsonville Fire District to vote on the annual budget of the district as we have been doing for the past 35 years, if not longer, until this past May.

This past May, at the annual Fire District Meeting, the Board of Commissioners of the TFD, based on an opinion of new legal counsel and ignoring the precedent set for over a generation, took the vote for the approval of the budget from the taxpayers and voted on the budget themselves. This budget passed by a 2 to 1 vote. The taxpayers at the meeting were outraged and demanded to vote on the budget. Our pleas and demands were ignored and dismissed by the Board of Commissioners of the TFD.

As a result of this action, the grassroots organization, the Concerned Taxpayers of the Thompsonville Fire District was formed in June of 2013. As the CTTFD states in its original charter, the purpose of the organization is to insure that the full unfettered right to vote on the annual budget of the TFD is restored to the taxpayers of the fire district. Only when right to vote on the budget is restored, can the taxpayers of the district be assured that the long term interests of the taxpayers are being respected and adhered to.

The first official acts of CTTFD were to elect its officers. I, Jeff Cross was elected as President, Don Christmas as Vice President, and Jeanette Lamontagne as Secretary/Treasurer. Our first goal was to determine if we had any legal recourse to overturn the action of the Board of Commissioners. Thanks to the initial contributions of funds from the founding members of the CTTFD, we able to raise just enough to discuss our legal situation with an attorney. Through recommendations of the membership, we met with Attorney Ryan McKeen. Ryan first indicated he agreed that the taxpayers of the district were wronged but we faced a huge uphill battle, and our chances of winning our vote back in court were at best 50/50. But he felt we had a case and he was willing to fight for us all the way,

The CTTFD, through a close vote of the membership, decided to move forward with legal action. Myself as President of the CTTFD, and other taxpaying residents signed the Fee agreement with Ryan. On July 2, 2013, suit was filed in Hartford Superior Court beginning the process to regain our vote.

The CTTFD began soliciting donations for the legal fund by canvassing the Fire District, explaining our position to everyone who would lend an ear, and the donations began coming in. We began holding meetings in the living room of a house being remodeled by a supporter. As we outgrew that space, we

moved the meetings to the Old Polish Home, a venerated establishment in Thompsonville. Throughout the summer of 2013, the CTTFD raised funds through the small contributions of the residents via tag sales as well as mailers to the taxpayers of the district. Thompsonville is hardly an affluent community, but the people dug deep and supported the CTTFD and their actions.

In late summer of 2013, trial began in the Courtroom of Judge Peck. Despite the previous admonishments by Ryan, I felt confident we were in the right and we were going to win. However, despite the words written in the 2009 amendment of the Special Act governing the fire district of which was passed through this very committee which was then chaired by Representative Sharkey, who now I believe is Speaker of the House, 'the elector's may vote on any matter at annual or special meeting of the district', Judge Peck ruled against us. Of course we of the CTTFD were devastated by the ruling. After long and intense meetings of the Plaintiffs as well as the membership of the CTTFD, we decided to appeal.

At this time, while the appeal was continuing the CTTFD decided to pursue other avenues as well since the appeal process is a long tedious (and expensive) process. Through the auspices of our Attorney, Ryan McKeen, I met with our State representative Dave Alexander. Representative Alexander also saw that our position regarding the vote was correct and proper way to proceed so he initiated a meeting with Jason Rojas, the current Chairman of this House committee. Representative Rojas agreed to allow us this hearing so here we are today.

There is currently legislation in front of you to restore the full, unfettered vote of the taxpayers of the Thompsonville Fire District. I am also aware of other interests who want to modify the vote based on any increase of certain percentage increases of one year to the next. But what we fear that has happened especially in the past year, the budget is becoming more of a political tool than an actual financial tool to plan the future of the district. Without the full, unfettered vote of the taxpayers to vote on every budget, the CTTFD feels the finances of the district may become more manipulated and less transparent than they are today. Besides, when my father hit the beaches of Normandy in June 1944, he wasn't fighting for provisional rights, provisional votes depending on this or that. He was fighting for our full rights as citizens of the country. The CTTFD feels it is doing the same today.

In conclusion, I am pleading with you to restore our vote. I am pleading with you, I am asking you, I am insisting of you, and I am demanding of you. Restore our vote.

Thank you for your time and your consideration of this vital matter.